The Builder.

No. CCXIX.

SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 1847.

ONE portion of the most important building now going on in Europe is completed, with the exception of some intended frescoes, and the stained glass in the windows; and before the present number of our journal reaches the public, will have been occupied by that branch of the legislature for whose use it is intended. As an example of what the whole structure, or rather pile of structures will be when finished, it is most satisfactory, and may be appealed to with confidence as an evidence of the constructive and artistic ability existing in England. There is nothing like it amongst us. It stands by itself; and cannot fail to have a great effect on the arts of the country.

The extent of the new "Palace of Westminster," is not understood by those who, passing on their way, gaze on the elaborately carved façade presented to the river, nor fully appreciated by the majority of visitors, even, who penetrate the inclosure, and pass with sight-seeing eyes around its length and breadth. It needs a longer acquaintance, a careful examination of it part by part, an ascent of scaffoldings, inspection of the means in operation, and comparison with other buildings, before the greatness of the work can be perfectly understood. When a knowledge of this is fully acquired, the absurdity of complaints made by those who ought to know better, against the slow progress of the building, and reflected in the doggrels of burlesque, where "Barry" was made to rhyme with "tarry," at once becomes apparent; and every intelligent mind must feel astonished that so *much* has been done so well, in the time that has elapsed since the commencement of the works. The delay that was caused in respect of the ventilation, and the difference between working for an individual and working for Government, from whom decisions are sometimes not to be obtained for weeks, must also be remembered, and the surprize will be still further increased.* Remember, the building covers *nine acres*, and has a frontage of nine hundred feet; that there are eleven open courts, and that the highest tower, to which we must refer again hereafter, will be 346 feet high.

As to an architect's own power of production, that seems never to enter the mind of the public. As we said in an article written in the middle of 1845 (when some of the peers were pressing forward the works unduly), and which, as we were informed at the time, had a beneficial effect,—"Some persons think, if we may use the word where no thought is really given, that when an architect has produced the design for a building his work is over, and that it may, without further thought, be forthwith carried out. Nothing is more erroneous, especially as regards Gothic architecture; it is then that the architect's labour commences, and his skill is proved. In such a work as the Houses of Parliament, every superficial yard demands the closest thought, and requires as many detailed drawings, in some cases, as for the whole of an ordinary dwelling-house. Every ornament, every moulding, every line, must be produced and delineated; and over all these does Mr. Barry's pencil pass. An architect careless of his reputation may get through any amount of work, by deputy; but if determined to execute it to the best of his power, strive as he may, he can only produce a certain quantity; and we will venture to say, that the architect of the new Houses of Parliament finds little time for other occupations or for recreation, from early on Monday morning till late on Saturday night. The wear and tear must be immense.

The life of an architect, even under favourable circumstances, is one of toil and anxiety; and he needs to have no extraneous circumstances to harass and perplex him. We have heard a member of the lower House declare his ability to write poetry by the mile; we may probably find one of the upper House profess the power to design Gothic details by the acre, and laugh at the idea of limits to a man's power in so simple a matter. They would be equally entitled to credence; we should merely say they were exceptions from the general rule."

Our present immediate business is with that part of the new Houses of Parliament which is finished,—namely, the House of Lords; a view of which, taken from the north end of the House, below the "bar," will be found in our present number;* but we think it desirable to let this article treat of the building generally, and record briefly, for future reference, the progress of the works.

The *foundation* of the building next the river was commenced in 1839, by Messrs. Lee, of Chiswell-street. Messrs. Grissell and Peto undertook the first contract for the *superstructure* of the new Houses in 1840. It comprised the range of buildings *fronting the river*, with the returns next Westminster-bridge and at the south end towards Abingdon-street. This building includes the residence for the Speaker at the north end, the corresponding terminal towards the south being the residence for the Usher of the Black Rod. Between the two extremes, and comprising what are called the curtain portions, are the libraries for the House of Peers and the libraries for the House of Commons: in the immediate *centre* is the conference-room for the two Houses. All this is on the principal floor, which is some 15 feet above the terrace, or high-water mark. The whole of the floor above the libraries, and overlooking the river, is appropriated to committee-rooms for the purposes of Parliament, the Peers occupying about one-third towards the south, and the Commons two-thirds towards the north. The House of Peers and House of Commons are situated in the rear of the front building, or that next the river, and will, when completed, be inclosed also towards the west, so as to be entirely surrounded by Parliamentary offices.

* See page 183.

The second contract, also undertaken by Messrs. Grissell and Peto, comprised the House of Peers, the House of Commons, the Victoria Hall, the great Central Hall, the Royal Gallery and Commons Offices, next Palace-yard, and the Clock Tower, next Bridge-street. This was the second contract undertaken by Messrs. Grissell and Peto, but in Parliamentary votes, (we may mention it, in case our readers should hereafter refer to them), it is called contract No. 5. The third contract was St. Stephen's Hall and Porch, extending from the Central Hall at right angles, and communicating with the south end of Westminster Hall, and having a principal entrance also, opposite St. Margaret's Church and Poet's corner. This contract which is now in progress is called No. 6.

Contract No. 7 comprises the fittings of the entire building, and has been undertaken by Mr. Grissell alone, Mr. Peto, who was concerned jointly with Mr. Grissell in the previous contracts, having retired from the building business.

Contract No. 5 is expected to be completed in the course of the present summer. No. 6 will be completed by the end of the present year, as far as the carcase is concerned, and the contract No. 7, for the fitting and finishing of the whole building, can scarcely fail to occupy the next four or five years. It will be seen from this, that with the exception of a portion of the foundation, the whole of the contract works have been undertaken by Messrs. Grissell and Peto, and are now in the hands of Mr. Grissell.

Confining ourselves for the present to generalities,—the plan of the building is exceedingly simple and beautiful. From the Centre Hall, an octagon of 70 feet, a corridor to the north (to your right, if you stand with your back to the Thames), leads to the Commons' Lobby and Commons' House; and a corridor to the south, to the Peers' Lobby, one of the chambers completed, and the House of Peers. Opposite to the spectator (still standing as before) is St. Stephen's Hall and Porch, communicating, by noble flights of steps, with Westminster Hall, and forming an approach of unequalled magnificence. It is worthy of remark, that when the floor of St. Stephen's Hall is reached, there is no one step throughout the whole extent,—all is of one level. In a line with the House of Lords, still further to the south, are the Victoria Hall (now finished), the Royal Gallery (a noble apartment, 100 feet long, 45 feet wide, and 45 feet high, to be filled with paintings and sculptures), and the Queen's Robing Room, communicating with the Royal Staircase and Tower at the south-west corner of the pile, now rearing itself in Abingdon-street.

The construction of the building throughout is externally of magnesian limestone from North Anstone, in Yorkshire, near Worksop, Notts. It is a beautiful close grained stone, of a texture considerably harder than Portland, and somewhat warmer in colour. The interior parts of the walls are of hard burnt Cowley stocks, exclusively from the fields of Mr. Westbrook, of Heston, which are admitted to be the best manufactured of any that are made for the London market. The bearers of the floors are of cast-iron, with brick arches turned from girder to girder; the entire roofs are of wrought-iron covered with cast-iron plates galvanised; the gutters are also of cast-iron galvanised; so that the carcases of the entire buildings are fire-proof, not any timber having been used in their construction. Wrought-iron bond, in courses of brickwork in cement, is used throughout all the walls.

* A writer in the last number of the *Athenæum* says on this head,—"Take the records of cathedral building in general. Take Cologne itself, with the wealth of the empire and the contributions of Christendom: and when you find that the choir alone, begun in 1248 on Italian Boisserée table and was not ready for decoration till 1322, and contrast it with the few years which have sufficed for this pile of building, your surprise will change into admiration of that union of system and science with ingenuity and skill which have placed before us in a few short years what seems work for at least half a century. Of this I think we may now say what Petrarch said of Cologne, nine years after the choir only was finished.—'Fuit templum arte multa pulcherrimum, quamvis incompletum, quod haud immerito nostrum ævum.'

Permit me here just to notice, that there is one thing very remarkable in the organization which has been used to complete this great work. Every element of modern science, every material and process of modern manufacture and invention, that could facilitate the execution or secure the stability of the edifice, have been unsparingly used. We have zinc roofing, iron rafters, cast-iron beams, plate glass—all new—introduced into the work as materials; and railroads, railroad carriages and travelling cranes, and rectangular combinations of parallel framing, all contributing to the perfection of a work—no different from our and want, yet so contrasted to the effect intended. I may say that I do not think it would have been possible, without all the refinements and modern improvements introduced so unsparingly by Mr. Barry, and without the gymnastic organization in the mere building department which the contractors, Messrs. Grissell and Peto, seem to have employed, and which arrangements have resulted, I may remark, very much from the practice and methods invented by civil engineers (architects in recent times for their great modern undertakings.—I say, I do not think that without the modern system of extreme subdivision of labour and the improved machinery of modern times, it would have been possible, even with an innumerable army of slaves and an absolute monarchy to put them in motion, to have done so much work in so short a period of time. And this inevitably suggests that it may soon be possible, by the aids of modern machinery, to erect in modern times buildings that may not only rival but far outvie, in grandeur and magnificence, the productions of ancient times."